

Gilcrest 025

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~~AMENDMENT TO H.R. 2646, AS REPORTED~~
~~OFFERED BY MR. GILCREST OF MARYLAND~~

AMENDMENT NO. ____: At the end of the bill, insert the following:

1 **TITLE X—CONSERVATION**
2 **CORRIDOR PROGRAM**

3 **SEC. 1001. CONSERVATION CORRIDOR PROGRAM.**

4 (a) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this title is to provide
5 for the establishment of a program that recognizes the le-
6 veraged benefit of an ecosystem-based application of the
7 Department of Agriculture conservation programs, ad-
8 dresses the increasing and extraordinary threats to agri-
9 culture in many areas of the United States, and recognizes
10 the importance of local and regional involvement in the
11 protection of economically and ecologically important
12 farmlands.

13 (b) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary of Agriculture
14 (in this title referred to as the “Secretary”) shall establish
15 a Conservation Corridor Program through which States,
16 local governments, tribes, and combinations of States may
17 submit, and the Secretary may approve, plans to integrate
18 agriculture and forestry conservation programs of the
19 United States Department of Agriculture with State, local,
20 tribal, and private efforts to address farm preservation,
21 water quality, wildlife, and other conservation needs in

1 critical areas, watersheds, and corridors in a manner that
2 enhances the conservation benefits of the individual pro-
3 grams, tailors programs to State and local needs, and pro-
4 motes and supports ecosystem and watershed-based con-
5 servation.

6 (c) MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT.—On approval of
7 a proposed plan, the Secretary may enter into a memo-
8 randum of agreement with a State, a combination of
9 States, local governments, or tribes, that—

10 (1) guarantees specific program resources for
11 implementation of the plan;

12 (2) establishes different or automatic enroll-
13 ment criteria than otherwise established by regula-
14 tion or policy, for specific levels of enrollments of
15 specific conservation programs within the region, if
16 doing so will achieve greater conservation benefits;

17 (3) establishes different compensation rates to
18 the extent the parties to the agreement consider jus-
19 tified;

20 (4) establishes different conservation practice
21 criteria if doing so will achieve greater conservation
22 benefits;

23 (5) provides more streamlined and integrated
24 paperwork requirements; and

1 (6) otherwise alters any other requirement es-
2 tablished by United States Department of Agri-
3 culture policy and regulation to the extent not incon-
4 sistent with the statutory requirements and purposes
5 of an individual conservation program.

6 **SEC. 1002. CONSERVATION ENHANCEMENT PLAN.**

7 (a) PREPARATION.—To be eligible to participate in
8 the program under this title, a State, combination of
9 States, political subdivision or agency of a State, tribe,
10 or local government shall submit to the Secretary a plan
11 that proposes specific criteria and commitment of re-
12 sources in the geographic region designated, and describes
13 how the linkage of Federal, State, and local resources
14 will—

15 (1) improve the economic viability of agriculture
16 by protecting contiguous tracts of land;

17 (2) improve the ecological integrity of the eco-
18 systems or watersheds within the region by linking
19 land with high ecological and natural resource value;
20 and

21 (3) in the case of a multi-State plan, provide a
22 draft memorandum of agreement among entities in
23 each State.

24 (b) SUBMISSION AND REVIEW.—Within 90 days after
25 receipt of the conservation plan, the Secretary shall review

1 the plan and approve it for implementation and funding
2 under this title if the Secretary determines that the plan
3 and memorandum of agreement meet the criteria specified
4 in subsection (c).

5 (c) CRITERIA FOR PARTICIPATION.—The Secretary
6 may approve a plan only if, as determined by the Sec-
7 retary, the plan provides for each of the following:

8 (1) Actions taken under the conservation plan
9 are voluntary and require the consent of willing
10 landowners.

11 (2) Criteria specified in the plan and memo-
12 randum of agreement assure that enrollments in
13 each conservation program incorporated through the
14 plan are of exceptionally high conservation value.

15 (3) The program provides benefits greater than
16 the benefits that would likely be achieved through
17 individual application of the federal conservation
18 programs because of such factors as—

19 (A) ecosystem- or watershed-based enroll-
20 ment criteria;

21 (B) lengthier or permanent conservation
22 commitments;

23 (C) integrated treatment of special natural
24 resource problems, including preservation and
25 enhancement of natural resource corridors; and

1 (D) improved economic viability for agri-
2 culture.

3 (4) Staffing and marketing, considering both
4 Federal and non-Federal resources, are sufficient to
5 assure program success.

6 (d) APPROVAL AND IMPLEMENTATION.—Within 90
7 days after approval of a conservation plan, the Secretary
8 shall begin to provide funds for the implementation of the
9 plan.

10 (e) PRIORITY.—In carrying out this section, the Sec-
11 retary shall give priority to multi-State or multi-tribal
12 plans.

13 **SEC. 1003. FUNDING REQUIREMENTS.**

14 (a) COST-SHARING.—As a further condition on the
15 approval of a conservation plan submitted by a non-Fed-
16 eral interest under section 1002, the Secretary shall re-
17 quire the non-Federal interest to contribute at least 20
18 percent of the total cost of the Conservation Corridor Pro-
19 gram.

20 (b) EXCEPTION.—The Secretary may reduce the
21 cost-share requirement in the case of a specific activity
22 under the Conservation Corridor Program on good cause
23 and demonstration that the project or activity is likely to
24 achieve extraordinary natural resource benefits.

1 (c) COORDINATION.—The Secretary shall require
2 that non-Federal interests contributing financial resources
3 for the Conservation Corridor Program shall implement
4 streamlined paperwork requirements and other procedures
5 to allow for integration with the Federal programs for par-
6 ticipants in the program.

7 (d) RESERVATION OF FUNDS.—The Secretary shall
8 direct funds on a priority basis to the Conservation Cor-
9 ridor Program and to projects in areas identified by the
10 plan.

11 (e) ADMINISTRATION.—A State may submit multiple
12 plans, but the Secretary shall assure opportunity for sub-
13 mission by each State. Acreage committed as part of ap-
14 proved Conservation Reserve Enhancement Programs
15 shall be considered acreage of the Conservation Reserve
16 Program committed to a Conservation Enhancement Pro-
17 gram.

Amend the table of contents accordingly.